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THE TORQUE·TUBE

THE NEWS PUBLICATION FOR MEMBERS

OF THE 1937-1938 BUICK CLUB • FOUNDED 1980



Volume X • Number 2

Index to Volume IX



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Volume X, Number 2

October 1991

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Miscellaneous Matter



As of October 15, only about 20 members had not renewed, so we are about back to our previous size of over 400 members. It is usually the case that a few stragglers keep coming in through the end of November, and we continue to add new members at a slow but steady rate, so I guess that my annual fears that the Club will fall apart are unfounded. (They probably have been unfounded for some time, but I keep having them nevertheless.)

I had some struggles getting this issue together; some seem to be a good deal easier than others. The more work in the office and around the house, of course, the more interference with what some of you may consider my most important function. Fall is always a problem, because of the seemingly-inevitable necessity of finishing up all the painting and outside repairs I did not do during the summer because it was too hot, or because I had to go to a car show. Then there are the leaves to rake up, and this fall the acorns. We have had, here in Ohio, the largest crop of acorns and hickory nuts I have ever seen: no squirrel or chipmunk should starve this winter. I spent some happy hours taking apart one of my downspouts that was clogged with literally thousands of acorns. The damned things are everywhere. Moreover, if the truth be squarely faced, I have neither the capacity for, nor the interest in, house and yard work that I had 25 years ago, or even five years ago. The notion of living in the desert, where it doesn't rain much and there aren't any trees, seems more and more appealing as time goes on.



Many years ago, the now-legendary automobile tester and columnist Tom McCahill said this: "The most important safety device in any automobile is the knob the driver hangs his hat on." In other words: pay attention to what you're doing and use your head. That advice may be more appropriate now than it was in the 1950s. Based upon several years and many thousands of miles of observation, I have come to the following conclusions: (1) modern cars have been made too easy to drive, and the array of safety



FOUNDED BY DAVE LEWIS



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devices in them — passive restraints, air bags, and the like — has tended to give drivers a false sense of security; (2) as a consequence of that, and of our craze for technology, gadgetry and gimmickry, people now believe they can appropriately do any number of things while driving a car other than paying attention to what in hell they ought to be paying attention to; and (3) television ads for cars may well tend to encourage people to drive in an unsafe manner.

Notwithstanding the maddening difficulties they can present when they do go haywire, automobiles today are doubtless more reliable than ever before, and what with automatic transmissions, power assists, six-way seats, cruise control, etc. almost any idiot can drive them with very little effort. That is just the trouble. Any 50-plus-year-old car, not to mention the real oldies with manual spark advance, "crash boxes," and mechanical brakes, no matter how expertly rehabilitated, requires effort and concentration to drive. A modern car requires, or, more precisely, seems to require, very little of either. Driving is essentially boring, and people consider it a waste of time. So, they are filling the time with purportedly "useful activities, like talking on the telephone. No matter how easy cars may be to drive, one still must continuously observe other cars on the road, stay a safe distance behind the car ahead, change lanes with caution, stop at red lights, etc., etc. Those "useful" activities are sufficiently distracting so that such elementary rules are often disregarded.

Car telephones are probably the worst. In the past two weeks alone, I have had two or three "near-misses" with real estate salesmen, or big-time surgeons, or whoever in hell they were, talking on or dialing their damned phones while their cars weaved randomly down the road. Convenient they may be, but if I had my way no mobile phones would work unless the cars they were in were not in motion. The high-tech radios and tape players are almost as bad. Typically, these things have a bewildering array of tiny buttons, whose functions are identified by tiny print, or worse yet, tiny symbols, located in the middle of the dashboard well below eye level. I can't see the damn things, much less figure out what all the buttons are supposed to do: I can't see them out of the top of my bifocals, and I can't see them out of the bottom, either, without sticking my face right in front of them, and if I take my "specs" off, I can't see the road. I suspect a lot of other people are having the same trouble, but that doesn't stop them from fussing with their radios, or rummaging through the boxes of tapes they have in their cars, all the while paying no attention to what they're doing, which is driving a car.



COVERS



Very nice '38 Special sedan owned by Bill Mack (#839) of Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

A G.M. archive photo of a '38 Special. If you look carefully, you can see that they didn't clean the dirt off the running board before taking the picture; the location is not a terribly prepossessing one.

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Telephoning and tape-fussing by no means end the list. All of the following activities I have personally observed, within the past year, being engaged in on at least two occasions by drivers of cars on major highways going at least 55 MPH in moderate to heavy traffic.

Reading the newspaper.

Blow-drying their hair.

Otherwise fussing with their hair, or applying makeup.

Eating out of bowls or plates.

Shaving.

Clipping or filing their nails.

Putting on neckties or jewelry.

Brushing or flossing their teeth.

Women and men appear equally guilty. I have not counted ear- or nose-picking, drinking coffee, or singing, all of which are so widespread as to now be commonplace. And God knows what may be going on below window-level and thus out of sight; if certain truck drivers, who have higher vantage points, are to be believed...well, I leave this to your imaginations.

One incident perhaps deserves special mention. I came up behind a pickup truck, whose tailgate bore these slogans: "TRUST IN GOD," it said, and "READ THE BIBLE." The truck was going more-or-less straight ahead, but only more-or-less. I decided to pass (as quickly as possible), and upon drawing even with the driver, observed that he plainly believed in those admonitions: Holy Scripture was propped on the steering wheel. Now, friends, I denigrate no man's religion, or lack thereof, and condone no impediment to the free exercise thereof. But it seems to me there is an appropriate time and place for everything. I decided that I was better off at a distance.

Even if you watch television only sporadically, as I do, you can't miss the car commercials that seem almost invariably to show the advertised vehicle sweeping down a curving two-lane road at a great rate of speed. Curiously, there never seems to be any other traffic on those roads. That cars today corner and hold the road better than, say, a '57 DeSoto — or even a '37 Buick — cannot be gainsaid, and that is probably all

to the good. However, I cannot help but wonder whether the producers of these gee-whiz-ain't-this-exhilarating commercials are not doing us a great disservice. Not a few of the owners of these vehicles appear to believe that buying one confers upon them a license to replicate the exhibited performance under any and all circumstances, and more specifically, through four lanes of traffic at 5:30 PM on the Columbus Outerbelt at 65 MPH. What possesses these weavers-in-and-out I do not know, beyond the most outrageous disregard for every precept of safety, courtesy and common sense. It is perhaps no wonder that sometimes cars are shot at; I've felt like shooting at some of these fools myself.

Many of the maritime nations of the world continue to maintain great sailing ships for use in the training and education of naval cadets. (The U. S. Coast Guard's bark Eagle is an example.) The theory is that only by learning to do it as it once was done can the future officer gain a solid foundation for doing it as it is now done. Perhaps this theory should be applied to automobiles as well. No one should be licensed to drive a modern car until he or she has logged a few thousand miles in a 50-year-old one. I believe it would help things immensely. Too bad it lacks practicality.



A nice-looking '38 Century sport coupe in what appears to be Cezanne Beige, and with a set of Senior Trippe lamps, owned by Howard Vaillancourt (#440) of Guilford, Connecticut. The sharp-eyed may notice that the car has sidemount fenders without spare wheels in them; the covers were not finished when the photo was taken.

This issue contains our Annual Index to the matters covered in Volume IX -- or at least the ones you're likely to want to look up some time. Our thanks to Index-Maker John Breen (#533) for again taking on this task. In the next issue, I hope to present our annual survey of the occupations, businesses, avocations, and self-indulgent whimsies of the membership.

Fun in Rhode Island



OUR '38 SPECIAL — THE OBJECT IS TO HAVE FUN!

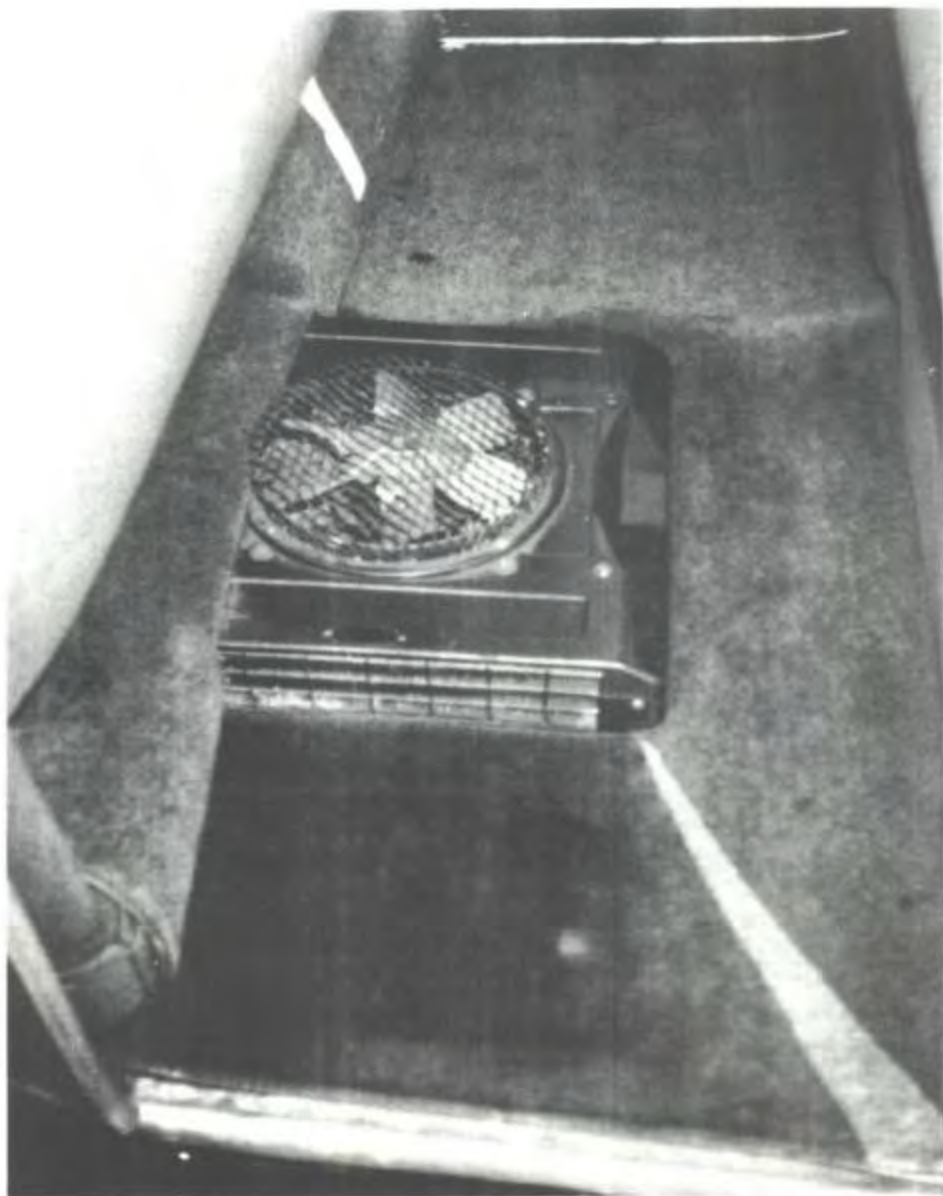
By Bill Mack #839

As a "baby boomer", automobiles have always been objects of interest to me. In the '50s I could identify just about every car on the road. Later my generation reveled in the delight of tire-burning muscle cars. For a long while this interest was dormant as I got along with the obligations of adulthood. In 1988 I saw a '53 Buick Super with a "for sale" sign and purchased it. My glasses were certainly rosey and a great many lessons were learned. These included: condition is everything, and buy the best car that you can afford.

In the spring of 1989 I saw a 1938 Special Model 41 parked on a used car lot. It looked good so I stopped. After a thorough check it still looked good so I asked if it was for sale. The owner, who dabbled in old cars as a hobby, gave me a price. It was more than I thought the car to be worth (by a price guide), and I left disappointed. Shortly thereafter, I returned with my wife and gave the car another look. The owner came down substantially on the price and we struck a deal.

Our new purchase needed some dressing up and we obtained a set of wide whites. It seemed like a good idea to attend the BCA National in Batavia so we made last-minute reservations. With a tune up and oil change complete, we set off on the Friday of the show. I can't believe that we thought driving 425 miles in a 51-year-old car that we had purchased two weeks before was a good idea.

It was HOT and on the Mass Turnpike west of Springfield the temperature gauge was at the top of the scale. After a break for soda and a sandwich we continued, reaching



Unusual after-market Arvin rear compartment heater in Bill Mack's '38.

the show after eleven hours of driving. The trip revealed that the car ran hot and hesitated going uphill. This was traced to a tired fuel pump.

The show was fun, although the accommodations in one of the area's second-line motels left something to be desired -- my wife Paulette suggested it be renamed the "Bates Motel." We met many nice folks and saw some restorations which were intimidating. The ride home to Woonsocket, RI, was uneventful.

The following winter we began to work on the car, having the front fenders painted and the bumpers chromed. The car has a sealed beam conversion and we elected to keep it, dressing it up with chrome rings. I also rebuilt the carburetor and fuel pump, and installed a 165° thermostat.

A summer of fun followed in which we attended many local shows. I began to feel a bit disheartened as it seemed that we would never win a trophy. The car had

deficiencies and I questioned if the effort was worth it. I don't have the facilities, abilities or cubic money to provide for a "frame-off". After talking things over we decided that we bought the car because we liked it and that the object was to have fun.

The past winter we had the rest of the car painted with DuPont Cronar. Disgusting said the purists, durable said we! The wheels are now red with silver pin stripes. The painter was surprised to see a blueprint for the work (from the TORQUE TUBE). Painting the engine with the help of Jim Terruso and replacing the trunk and door gaskets have about exhausted our funds for this year, although we did find the money to have the steering wheel recast. Richard Gumm of Marietta, OH, did a great job at a very reasonable cost.

Our car was solid and in good shape when we started. As an illustration, I removed all of the rear fender bolts without breaking any. We've been told that the car belonged to a doctor in Providence, RI, until the early 70s, and that we are the fourth owners. That may be pure bovine scatology but in any event it's obvious that the car was garaged all it's life, seeing little of New England winters. The interior is worn and will probably be replaced, though of course the good will go out with the bad. Improvements will be made a little bit at a time.

The engine is a bit tired but still pulls well. The car is happiest at about 45mph. It runs rich but the Carter WCD (from a '46) no longer provides a fine adjustment. I recently pulled the distributor apart and found a spring clip which retains a ball bearing had broken. It's been repaired and reassembled. The gap closing on the plugs (AC 46 set at .028) is a problem for which no one has provided an answer. They don't appear to be in contact with anything. Perhaps a reader has an answer. Of course I'm not much of a mechanic! I don't have immediate plans to have the engine rebuilt. Long trips are not a pleasant thought with the speed limited by the rear axle ratio. I have a '53 Roadmaster parts car but no idea of the feasibility of a swap.

Pride of ownership and driving enjoyment made this Buick desirable in 1938. It still does.



EDITOR'S NOTE: Along with his story, which I liked very much, Bill Mack sent me a little note; I will take the liberty of quoting here its concluding sentence: "As a police officer for sixteen years," he says, "it's rare that I'll compliment a lawyer, but you're a hell of an editor!"

Thanks, Bill, I appreciate that, and I'll return the favor: for a police officer you're a hell of an author! Some I've known can't write a complete sentence, much less handle stuff like "bovine scatology." (Look those up in your dictionaries, folks.) Actually, there's about as much similarity between me and most of the lawyers your average police officer gets to see as there is between, say, the Dalai Lama and Fidel Castro. All of that reminds me of one of my favorite Lawyer Jokes.

Two guys got to talking on an airplane. One said he was a field engineer for Xerox, or something like that, and then (in the innocently nosey way most Americans have) asked the other what he did for a living.

"I'm a Municipal Court Judge in Cleveland."

"Boy," said the first guy, "I'll bet you really see the dregs of society in there."

"Yes, I do," the judge replied, "and some of their clients aren't very nice people either."

(That enabled me to get in a little Cleveland-bashing. Sorry, guys, I couldn't resist.)

Seriously, now, I liked Bill Mack's story (which, incidentally, was in truth very well-written) because it is typical of the experience of so many of us, and it shows that one does not need to have Big Money, or a 400-point show vehicle, to enjoy the hobby. "We bought the car because we liked it and...the object was to have fun." Right! It sounds like Bill and Paulette are having fun, and I hope all the rest of you are having fun, too.

Return With Us Now...to those Thrilling Days of Yesteryear

JUNKYARD SATURDAY

By Clint Preslan (#461)

When was the last time you searched a junkyard for 1937-1938 Buick parts? A while back? In June, 1960 my brother Vic and I needed prewar auto parts. Vic had a '31 Model A and I owned a scruffy '33 Ford V-8. We were Buick fans, but Fords had materialized on our entry level.

In 1960, Hemmings was smaller than a Pee-Wee Herman comic book. Hershey was an obscure gathering in the eastern Pennsylvania hills, and old car enthusiasts were plain "nuts" in the minds of prudent people. If you were misguided and liked prewar cars, junkyards were places to go.

Even so, progressive yards around Cleveland, Ohio had scrapped their old stuff. Vic and I scouted rural junkyards in neighboring counties, often finding hammered hulks in the briers. We removed needed parts with zeal. These artifacts fit our wallets, but were far from "new old stock." This didn't bother us. Our cars were three nautical miles from N.O.S.

One bright Saturday afternoon Vic and I encountered our ultimate junkyard, the Perkins Avenue yard on the eastern edge of Sandusky, Ohio. A high corrugated metal fence once surrounded the yard, but had collapsed in many places. The gaps were closed with ragged wire fencing and old cables pulled tight against rusted poles. The poles jutted from the ground at crazy angles; vines, bushes, tall weeds and even small trees grew into and out of this verdant barrier.

Two old trucks squatted on the roadside by the main gate. One was a '29 Ford AA hand crank dump, rusted to the color of dirt. Its fossilized tires were almost flat.

"RUNS. NEEDS BATT." said the white paint on the cracked windshield, "\$75." Alongside was a faded red '34 Ford ton-and-a-half with a tired greyhound radiator mascot. "\$145. GOOD RUNNER" said the paint.

Beyond the gate yawned the open doors of a large metal garage. A few light bulbs burned in its dark interior. The clay and sparse gravel in front of the garage were stained a dark reddish-brown. Rusty metal scraps, cracked spark plugs, bent wire, exhaust clamps, broken piston rings, nuts, screws and sheared bolts were scattered over the ground.

A pleasant-looking grey-haired man in coveralls and wire-framed glasses told us most of the older cars were at the rear of his yard. He added "Be careful, boys. Nobody's been back there much. The weeds'll be high."

He wasn't kidding. The weeds were knee-high at the front of the yard, and this was where his "modern" stuff was: early 50's Dodges, Fords, Chevies, Plymouths, and a few caved-in pickups. We weaved through several rows of '50's iron to our first find, a 1930 Packard sedan cut down into a tow truck. The upper body retained some white paint and the fenders were once royal blue. Vic thought it might have worked out of a local Gulf garage. Other than mindless glass breakage and a missing radiator cap, it seemed complete as a truck. The cab conversion was well done.

A short distance through the weeds, we found old Buicks. First, a '34 or '35 sedan, blue, faded like an old pair of jeans. Both sides of the hood were propped open and its carburetor and manifolds were missing.



Mercury is still astride the nose of this '34 Buick and the chrome is still nice on the headlamp shells: 1960.



Sic transit gloria. 1930 Packard was once a prestige passenger car, then an improvised tow truck, finally, in 1960, a rusting relic. Some of the cars visible in the background were then less than 10 years old.

Nearby a big chalky-black '36 was sinking into the ground without wheels, its red grille badge glowing in the sunlight. Further on, I found a dark green '38 Century four-door almost overgrown with weeds. The car must have been in near-mint condition when it was brought into the yard. It still looked good. The windows were up and the interior was clean. In my mind's eye, I could see an elderly man whisking out the floor of the back seat, then carefully closing the door. Field mice and yellow jackets would be indifferent to his efforts.

The weeds were about waist-high when Vic located some half-dismantled Model A's. I assisted him in his search-and-remove operation, and he came out with a sack full of parts. Other than trucks, no '33 or '34 Fords were in the yard, but there were some V-8's from the late 30's. We made many unusual discoveries: an almost complete 1940 Graham-Hollywood sedan, a '34 DeSoto Airflow, the hollowed-out remains of a

late '20's Chrysler roadster, a '38 LeSalle coupe, a '37 Packard sedan in similar shape to the '38 Buick I found earlier, and a large purplish-blue '40 Packard, knife-nosed and heroic among rusted oil drums and ragweed.

I also unearthed something I never saw again in a junkyard, the body shell and windshield frame of a mid-20's Model T Ford roaster. The metal was rusted out and crumbling, but it was one of the 15 million.



Vic Preslan investigating the picked-over hulk of a '36 Ford with an elaborate home-made grille guard.

Vic's collection of "A" parts cost him about \$8.00. (Original gear knob, instrument panel with ammeter, fuel shut-off valve, side-valve cover, oil return tube, crank/lug nut wrench, and so on). I had come up empty. I was looking for a good spare wheel for my '33.

"'33 Ford? I thought you were looking for Model A's. We got some Ford wheels by the building. Might be one there."

To the right of the garage was a jumble of rusted rims, springs, axles and brake drums. After a 10-minute scramble in the pile, I fished out a 17-inch Ford wire wheel, red with rust but solid; no artistic holes. It even had a tire, a crummy charcoal-grey carcass worse than those on the AA out front. I had my spare wheel. It would clean up well. I paid \$4.00 for the wheel (and tire). It was a good day.

On our next trip two weeks later, I brought along the radiator cap from my '33.

I hope to trade it and a few dollars for the greyhound cap on the '34 truck. The AA was there, the '34 was gone.

"Yep, you shoulda been here last Monday. Orchard farmer over in Danbury bought it. Good truck. Owner started it every week."

Vic and I spent other afternoons in the Perkins Avenue yard, but none were as memorable as the first. At the time, we thought junkyards like Perkins Avenue would go on forever, but the cars have vanished and the yard is gone for good.

Perhaps in some forgotten field other young men walk and wonder, excited by the ruins of fine Corinthian Cordobas, Vegas, Pintos, Gremlins...Camrys....

....Nahh.

As our Editor once wrote, "One person's trash can be someone else's good shit." The Perkins Avenue yard embraced it all.



Clint Preslan stands in the site of the Perkins Avenue yard 31 years after his "junkyard journey." A few wrecked vans are all that remain, but the goldenrod is still blooming.

EDITOR'S NOTE

My Lord, friends, to think now of what was lying neglected in the weeds there in Sandusky, Ohio only 31 years ago: a '34 DeSoto Airflow, the best-looking example of that curious excursion into futurism; a Hollywood Graham, the swan song of Cord's magnificently impractical vision; more conservative, but no less an exemplar of those days, a '38 Century. Doubtless they, and their companions in that weed-grown field, are long gone now, perhaps reincarnated several times over as dumpsters or railroad



TECHNICAL TIPS



PAINT COLORS

Recently I acquired a set of 1938 paint chips and formulas by Sherwin-Williams, whose automotive finishes were at the time trade-named "OPEX". This appears to establish clearly that 1937 Hampton Grey (512), for which we have never come up with a mixing formula using modern paints, is the same color as 1938 Homer Grey (521). Hampton Grey 512 seems to have replaced Hampton Grey 510 at some time during the 1937 model year. (The Sherwin-Williams chart states that Homer Grey "also matches Hampton Grey (Comb. No. 512) used on late 1937 Buick models".)

The S-W chart also states that 1938 Whistler Grey (520) is the same color as 1937 Wellington Grey (505); that 1938 Van Gogh Green is the same as 1937 Coronary Green (502); and that 1938 Botticelli Blue (519) is the same as 1937 Sudan Blue (504). It appears that these statements are correct in the cases of the various "greys" and the green: comparison of the original DuPont formulas shows that in each case the formula is the same. (DuPont was the "factory" General Motors paint.) Indeed, the green was used from 1936 well into the 1940s, when it was called "Verde Green". The statement concerning Sudan Blue and Botticelli Blue is, however, questionable: the DuPont charts show different formulas for these colors, and I do not believe they were the same.

Curiously, the S-W chart refers to 1938 color No. 525 as "Santa Anita Beige". In all other charts and the Buick parts books this is called "Cezanne Beige". The '38 colors were all named after well-known artists — Rembrandt Black, Van Gogh Green, etc. — and "Santa Anita" obviously doesn't fit into this scheme.



QUESTIONS



THE SELF-SHIFTING TRANSMISSION

QUESTION: I would like to know something about the "Self-Shifter" transmission used on some '38s. Was it like Dynaflo? How many were made? Are there any left?

ANSWER: We had a three or four page article on the Self-Shifter several years ago, a copy of which I sent to the questioner. (I also have an original owner's manual for it.) Without going into as much detail this time, I can give a brief summary. No, it was nothing like Dynaflo. Self-Shifter-equipped cars had a friction clutch coupled to a hydraulically-operated planetary transmission, which also had mechanically selected forward and reverse gears. (The Model T had a planetary transmission, but it was operated mechanically. A planetary transmission is one in which "planet" gears revolve around a central "sun" gear inside a ring.) The Self-Shifter transmission had four forward speeds. With a lever mounted on the steering column, the driver could select "Low,"

"High," or "Reverse." The clutch had to be depressed when shifting into forward, neutral or reverse or when coming to a stop, but once under way the transmission shifted automatically. In "High" range, it started in first, then shifted into third, and then into fourth, which was "direct" (no gear reduction). There was a "kickdown" feature, by which the transmission could be downshifted from fourth to third by depressing the accelerator pedal. In "Low" the transmission shifted from first to second and stayed there, but the driver could shift into "High" range without depressing the clutch.

The Self-Shifter was available only on 40-series cars and only in 1938. Most of these cars had the 60-series 3.9 rear end gears, but some were produced with a special 3.62 rear end. It was believed that the four-speed transmission required less of a gear reduction in the rear end with the 248 CID engine, and that the higher ratio would give more comfortable highway cruising. This was essentially correct; however, the 3.62 rear end apparently did not give adequate performance on hills for some customers. The 1928-1938 Master Parts Book effective January 1, 1938 lists this as the ring and pinion set for the Self-Shifter, but it is believed that shortly thereafter Buick changed to the 3.9 rear end, at least for cars supplied to the Eastern and Rocky Mountain markets.

The following table may be interesting in this respect. It shows engine RPM in a 40-series car with 6.50 x 16 tires at 80 MPH

<u>Gear Ratio</u>	<u>RPM</u>
4.4:1	4156
3.9:1	3684
3.62:1	3436

The difference is apparent. At 80 MPH the manual transmission car with "standard" 4.4 rear end had probably reached (or gone beyond) its limit, whereas the Self-Shifter car with 3.62 gears was at the peak of the engine's horsepower curve. (3400 RPM with the 4.4 rear end gives about 65 MPH.)

The Self-Shifter was offered as an option on Oldsmobiles from 1937 until 1940, when GM brought out the Hydramatic transmission. (Hydramatic was, and still is, a four-speed planetary transmission coupled to a torque converter; the fluid coupling provided by the torque converter enabled GM to eliminate the clutch altogether.) Buick was selected to build the Self-Shifter (or "Safety Transmission" as Olds called it) because it had plant capacity to do so; Buick made all of these transmissions and sold them to Olds. However, Buick engineers really wanted nothing to do with it, and after the brief experiment with Self-Shifters in 1938, Buick refused to put automatic transmissions into its cars until it had developed the Dynaflo in the late 1940s. The primary reason for this attitude was a belief that the hydraulically-operated planetary transmission would not work well with the torque-ball-and-tube drive, which employed a single U-joint rather than two, and to which Buick was irrevocably committed. They were right; it didn't. (Dynaflo, otherwise sometimes known as the "slush pump," is essentially only a torque converter: no planetary gearset.)

Approximately 3,900 Buick Specials were sold in 1938 with Self-Shifter transmissions, or about 2.7% of all Specials produced. Three or four Club members have Self-Shifter-equipped cars, and I believe at least a couple of these are functional. To convert a Self-Shifter car to manual transmission virtually requires finding a parts car, because many driveline parts besides the transmission are different.





The model illustrated is the
BUICK SPECIAL, 4-door
streamline sedan —
\$1022 complete with standard
equipment, delivered at Flint.

WHEN
BETTER AUTOMOBILES
ARE BUILT OTHERS
TILT

WILLING WORKER, handy
at anything, wants steady job

A JOB carrying you to and from town and about your business quicker and easier and more enjoyably than you've been carried before!

A job saving your gasoline, by getting more power from it, and making each drop of fuel do more!

A job ironing out bumps and taming the thank-you-ma'ams, taking the jounce and jiggle out of back-seat riding, and even greatly reducing skid-risks when the going's slippery!

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A GENERAL

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STEERING WHEELS

QUESTION: My car, a '38 Model 41, has a plain steering wheel that is a grayish color. It does not have the horn ring or plastic rim that one usually sees. I have not seen any other '38s with this kind of steering wheel. The car was built at Southgate, California. Can you explain this?

ANSWER: In 1937 and probably 1938 also, the "standard" steering wheel was a plain, three-spoke, hard rubber wheel, painted the same color as the steering column. The so-called "banjo" or "flexible" wheel with plated spokes and hub, horn ring, and cream-colored plastic rim, was a "standard accessory." "Standard accessories" were largely a pricing gimmick: Buick could advertise prices "as low as \$ _____ delivered in Flint" and mean a car without the "standard accessories." For 40-series cars, there were several of them: trim rings, dash clocks, cream-colored gearshift knobs, etc. Virtually all cars shipped from the factories to dealer stock probably had all the "standard accessories" on them; however, it appears that in at least some markets, the two 40-series "plain-back" sedans (models 44 and 47) and the business coupe (model 46) were routinely delivered without trim rings, clocks, and the "flexible" wheel: these had the hard rubber wheel instead. (I once owned such a model 47 that had originally been sold in Delaware, Ohio. It had come with no "accessories" at all, except perhaps a heater. This car had the hard rubber wheel.) I would not expect a model 41 to have the hard rubber wheel. Several possible explanations suggest themselves: (1) it was not there originally, but was sometime during the life of the car put on as a replacement for a "flexible" wheel that had deteriorated, as they tended to do; (2) the original dealer wanted his 40-series cars that way; (3) Buick made model 41s that way for the market in which your car was originally sold; (4) the original purchaser special-ordered the car with a hard rubber wheel; (5) the factory temporarily ran out of "flexible" wheels and did not want to interrupt production. Each one of these seems to me as probable as any of the others.

All of the foregoing cannot be documented precisely, but is strongly suggested by various documents I have seen. For example, original price lists from the New York City and Pittsburgh areas appear to indicate that the cars were equipped somewhat differently from one area to the other. Cars shipped to Arizona or Florida may well not have had heaters, but it seems likely that all cars shipped to Cleveland or Duluth did.

Besides the '37 Special I owned from 1983 to 1987, I have seen only one or two cars with the hard rubber steering wheel, but in my opinion these wheels are "correct" for any '37 or '38. It may be noted in conclusion that these wheels made up in durability what they lacked in looks. Mine, which I took off the Special and still have, is good as new except for a few paint chips, whereas the plastic on virtually every original "flexible" wheel is now badly cracked and eroded. It should also be noted that, in '37 and most likely '38 as well, the horn button parts for the hard rubber wheel do not interchange with those for the "flexible" wheel. Thus, if you want to change, you will need a complete set of parts including the horn button and the various pieces that go under it.



Well, folks, I warned you that if no new technical material showed up in my mailbox, I would repeat some of the better (in my judgment, anyway) pieces that have appeared in the past. None did, and I am. The following is an article that first appeared in Volume V, Number 5 (March 1987) and which I believe contains considerable useful information for both the novice and the more advanced restorer. The primary source for this material was now-former member Bob Pipkin, who dropped out of the Club a few years ago when he decided to concentrate on more recent iron: i.e. a '54 Skylark. Bob's counsel is still with us, however (indeed, I consulted him in the course of my own engine rebuild), and I think it is fair to say that no one in the history of the Club has made a greater contribution of sound and practical advice on engines and running gear.

Buick Torque Tube Drive

**A LITTLE THEORY AND A LITTLE PRACTICE
BY THE EDITOR AND BOB PIPKIN**

Those who were members in the first half of 1985 will remember our "Name That Newsletter" contest, the final result of which was the present name of this publication. Among other reasons, "The Torque Tube" was chosen because torque tube drive was a distinctive feature of Buick cars from before 1920. Some people (not necessarily members of this Club) have asked me: "Just what is a torque tube, anyway?" Although it is assumed that all of you have at least a general idea, I thought it would be helpful to have a little review of the principles of torque tube drive. This will be followed by a more technical article by Bob Pipkin (#076) of Salem, Oregon, on assembly and adjustment of the unusual parts that characterize the 1937 and 1938 (and later) Buicks.

First, let us consider the horse and wagon. It will quickly be observed that the source of energy -- the horse -- pulls the wagon forward from an ahead position, and that there are no reciprocating parts and no torque applied to the axles. The wheels do not propel the wagon, the energy applied by the horse may be transmitted to the wagon by a simple joint, and the wagon-maker is free to design the springs (or leave them out) considering only the desired amount of motion-dampening and isolation from road surface.

With a self-propelled machine, things obviously get more complicated. The wheels do not merely roll along. Energy is applied, from within the machine itself, to turn the driving wheels, and this twisting force, or torque, must be transmitted to the remainder of the machine to overcome inertia, friction, wind resistance, etc. and achieve linear motion. The first successful self-propelled vehicle was the steam locomotive. Here the reciprocating motion of the heavy rods and cranks caused problems, and since tracks could not be made perfectly level

and straight, the driving wheels and axles could not be attached to the frame with complete rigidity. However, the first problem could be solved by counterweighting the wheels, and tracks are sufficiently level so that extremely heavy leaf springs and semi-rigid joints could connect axles and frame.

The automobile must encounter rough roads, and it is held to the road surface only by friction. In the conventional front-engine, rear-drive layout, the turning rear axle and wheels must propel the car, yet the axle must be free to move up and down at least several inches to provide an acceptably jar-free ride and to stay in contact with the road. The axle must also be maintained in proper alignment perpendicular to the frame and at the correct distance from the front wheels. However, the heavy, stiff springs and frame to axle joints of the locomotive cannot be used.

The usual solution to these problems employed a drive shaft from transmission to rear axle with a universal joint at each end of the shaft, and semi-elliptic leaf springs firmly attached to the axle and rigidly bolted to the frame at their forward ends. In this system, the torque of the turning wheels is transmitted through the springs to the frame of the car. It will quickly be observed that: (1) the rigid connection of spring to frame is necessary, else the proper alignment will be lost and the spring will tend to twist itself off the car; and (2) the design of the spring must be a compromise between flexibility and strength. This system plainly will not work with coil springs, nor very well with transverse leaf springs. It also has several other problems, notably the tendency of the springs to "wind up" and of the wheels to "hop" and lose traction over rough surfaces.

Buick and some other makes adopted a different system, wherein the propelling force of the turning wheels is transmitted, not through the rear springs, but through a connection from the rear axle and differential case, through the transmission case to the engine block and thence through the engine mounts to the frame at the front of the car. This is accomplished by enclosing the drive shaft in a heavy steel tube which is rigidly fastened to the differential housing. The tube is called -- you guessed it -- the torque tube.

The torque tube system has some advantages. As in the 1937 Buick, rear leaf springs need not be rigidly attached to the frame, but can have shackles at each end, giving greater flexibility and transmitting less jar. This allows one U-joint to be used instead of two. And springs can be designed primarily to smooth the ride. "Wind-up" is minimized. Moreover, other types of springs may be used -- most importantly, rear coil springs, which Buick introduced in 1938. It was also thought preferable to apply the propelling force to the front end of the car.

The chief disadvantage is this: there must be semi-rigid joint between the torque tube and the transmission case. This joint must be flexible enough to permit the tube's other end to move up and down with the rear axle, yet strong and rigid enough to transmit the torque of the turning wheels without failure. Reflection will indicate that a ball-and-socket joint is ideal for this. However, since the tube is hollow, enclosing the drive shaft, and since the shaft must have a U-joint at the same location, the ball must also be hollow in order to enclose this joint and allow the shaft to pass through it. Likewise the "socket" part must allow passage of the shaft into the transmission. The ball-and-socket must also be lubricated, but the lubricant cannot be permitted to run off down the tube. This brings us to that unusual feature of Buicks: the torque ball and its related parts.*

Below is a sectional view of the 1937 large series transmission, torque ball and universal joint. (There are some differences, as one might expect, between the small and large series and between years, but this is a completely representative picture.) It will be seen that the "ball" (on the right) is made up of several parts, and that some of these are in effect the "socket" of my "ball and socket." The hemispherical moving part is bolted to a flange on the forward end of the torque tube, and this hemisphere is firmly held between inner and outer retaining hemispheres. These are fixed to the transmission rear bearing retainer, which itself has a hemispherical shape. (To me, these parts don't look strong enough to transmit all the torque, but obviously the system works, and I'm not an engineer.)

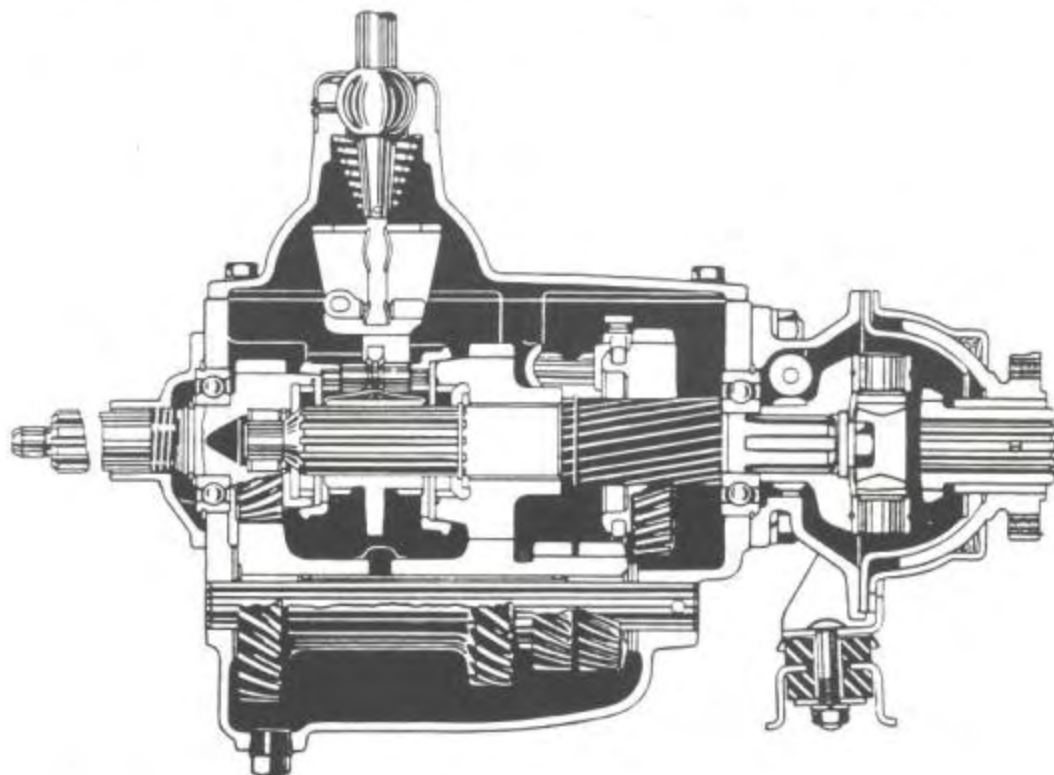


Fig. 7-1. Transmission, Sectional View—Series 60-80-90

*Footnote next page.

Below is an excerpt from the 1938 Shop Manual, which further explains the system.

UNIVERSAL AND BALL JOINT ASSEMBLY All Series

(See Figs. 7-1 and 7-2.)

The universal joint is entirely enclosed by the ball drive housing and bearing retainer and is lubricated automatically from the transmission. The front yoke of joint is attached to the transmission main shaft by splines and locked by a cap screw, plain washer and lockwasher. The rear yoke is attached to the propeller shaft by means of splines and is supported in a bronze bushing in the driving ball.

The hardened and ground steel cross is fitted with hardened and ground bushings to prevent wear on pins. The bushings are locked in place in the yokes by snap rings.

On Series 40, lubricant enters ball housing through slot in bearing retainer directly beneath rear transmission bearing. On Series 60-80-90, lubricant is caught by shelf in transmission case and feeds to ball housing through drilled hole in bearing retainer. All series have oil collecting groove around rear end of universal joint bushing. Larger drain back holes used on all 1938 Series allow surplus lubricant to drain back to transmission. The new type ball and bushing may be used on past model cars even though lubricant feed to ball housing is different than on 1938 series.

The driving ball is connected to the torque tube by means of a flange, and is

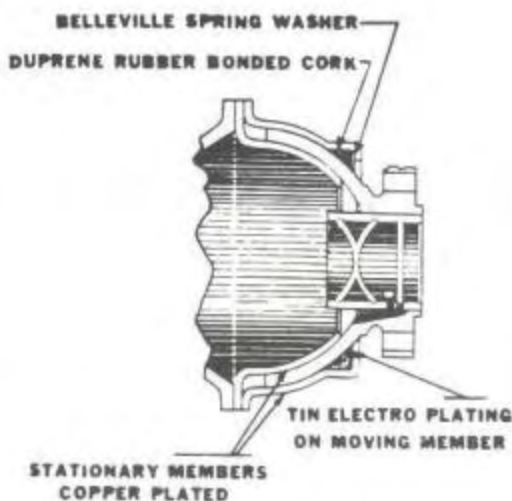


Fig. 7-15. Ball Joint

supported between two copper plated stampings (inner and outer retainers) which are centrally located and bolted to the transmission rear bearing retainer. The ball is plated on both the inner and outer surfaces to prevent scoring during break-in. The driving ball is marked with the word "TOP" to insure correct assembly.

The outer retainer carries a cork oil seal and spring washer that maintains a constant pressure on cork between the outer retainer and torque ball to prevent oil leak. See Fig. 7-15.

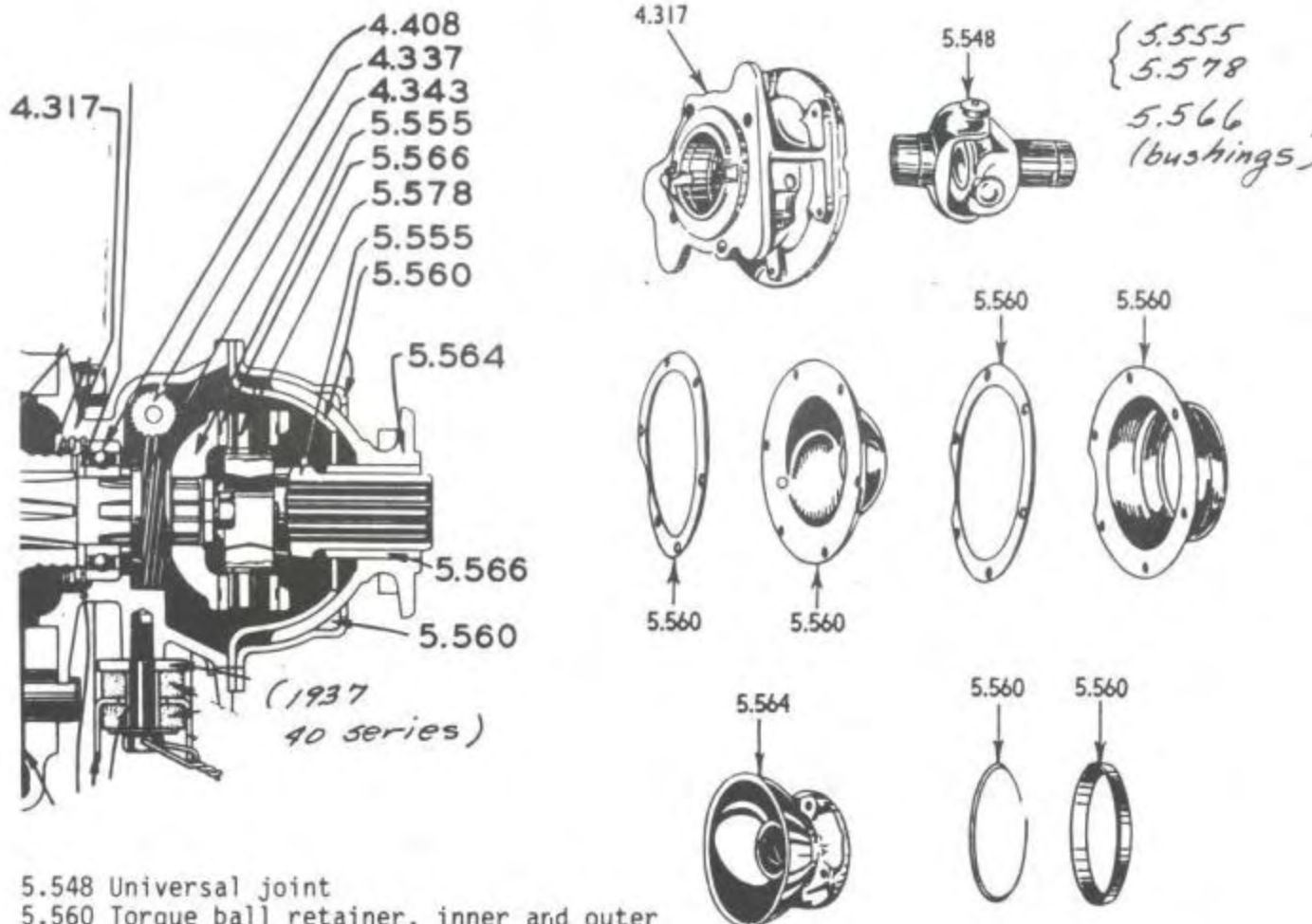
Spring washer is slightly cupped to afford tension and should be installed in retainer so that gap occurs between inside diameter of washer and edge of retainer.

*There is another way to do it with cars having rear coil springs, as many makes have today. A look underneath my 1979 LeSabre, for instance, would reveal a conventional two-joint open drive shaft, with the rear axle to frame connection accomplished through use of two heavy control arms attached to the axle housing and to the frame at approximately the locations that leaf springs would have been. I believe some recent smaller GM cars used a bizzare sort of longitudinal torque arm connecting axle and transmission.

ASSEMBLING AND ADJUSTING THE TORQUE BALL by Bob Pipkin

The "torque tube" was used as a means of transmitting power to the rear wheels on Buick automobiles from about 1915 to 1960. It was a strong and reliable method of keeping the rear wheels on the ground during acceleration and braking. It was almost trouble-free as long as everything was tight and lubricated properly.

The most common complaint about the Buick torque tube is the leak at the U-Joint and torque ball. The diagram shows the U-Joint and torque ball bolted together and also an exploded view. The parts requiring attention are identified in reference to the group numbers shown below:



- 5.548 Universal joint
- 5.560 Torque ball retainer, inner and outer
- 5.560 Torque ball retainer gaskets, inner and outer
- 5.560 Packing, cork beveled, outer retainer
- 5.560 Packing, cupped spring washer
- 5.564 Universal joint torque ball

The torque ball must be free from deep gouges on it's inner and outer surfaces. The bronze bushing in the torque ball must be free from deep scores and must fit over the U-Joint without excessive play. The inner and outer torque ball retainers should also be smooth and free from deep scratches and gouges. The U-Joint should be tight in the cross joint. The snout that fits into the torque ball should be free of deep scores. The fit in the bronze bushing should not be sloppy.

Assemble the torque ball with "TOP" stamped in the upper position. To adjust the torque ball assembly, remove the cork bevel packing ring. Coat the torque ball, inner and outer retainer in chassis lube or transmission oil. Assemble with a gasket between the transmission and the inner torque ball retainer. Start with one gasket between the inner torque ball retainer and outer torque ball retainer.

Place a six inch dowel in the U-Joint and move the torque ball assembly by hand while tightening the ring of bolts around the outer torque ball retainer. If you cannot move the torque ball with the dowel after the ring of bolts are tight; add another gasket between the outer torque ball retainer and the inner torque ball retainer. When the torque ball is adjusted correctly, with the bolts all tight, you should be able to move the torque ball with the dowel using about 5 to 10 foot pounds of pressure. Add or subtract gaskets to get the correct adjustment.

When you get the correct adjustment, remove the outer torque ball retainer and reinstall the beveled cork packing ring and the cupped spring washer. This cork packing was available in widths of 7/16", 15/32", and 1/2" wide in service packages. Reinstall the outer torque retainer with the correct gasket pack. Move the torque ball with the dowel while tightening the ring of bolts. When all the bolts are tight and beveled cork packing is in place, the dowel should move the torque ball with 15 to 20 foot pounds pressure.

The torque tube radius rods should be tightened evenly so correct tension is maintained on the torque tube. Keep the bolts tight that fasten the torque tube to the rear end housing.

These adjustment procedures differ somewhat from the instructions given in the 1937 and 1938 Buick shop manuals. I have used the 1948 shop manual and various product service bulletins to assemble these intructions. I use these procedures to adjust the torque ball assemblies on all my Buicks.

* * * * *

This is a good place for a tip sent in a few months ago by Mike Adler (#104). "All of a sudden" said Mike, "my transmission ran low on oil and my rear end was overfull. I refilled the transmission and drained some out of the rear end, but two days later the rear end was again overfull. The cause of this condition was excessive clearance between the bronze torque ball bushing and the universal joint yoke." After calling around the country to find a replacement without success, Mike

found that his local automotive machine shop could obtain a plain bronze bushing and machine it to the correct size. A byproduct of this repair was the elimination of a vibration problem.

In connection with torque tube work, it should be noted that torque ball seal kits, transmission gaskets -- and lots of other things as well -- can be obtained from Bob's Automobilia. See their ad in this issue.



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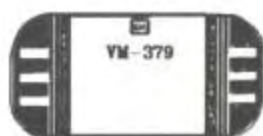
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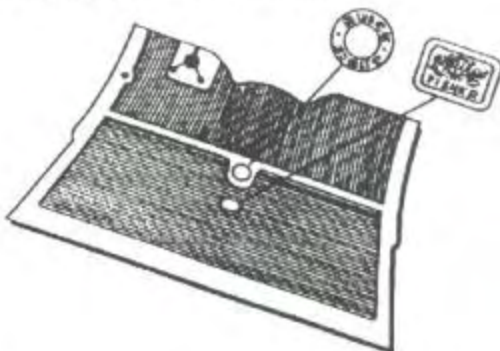


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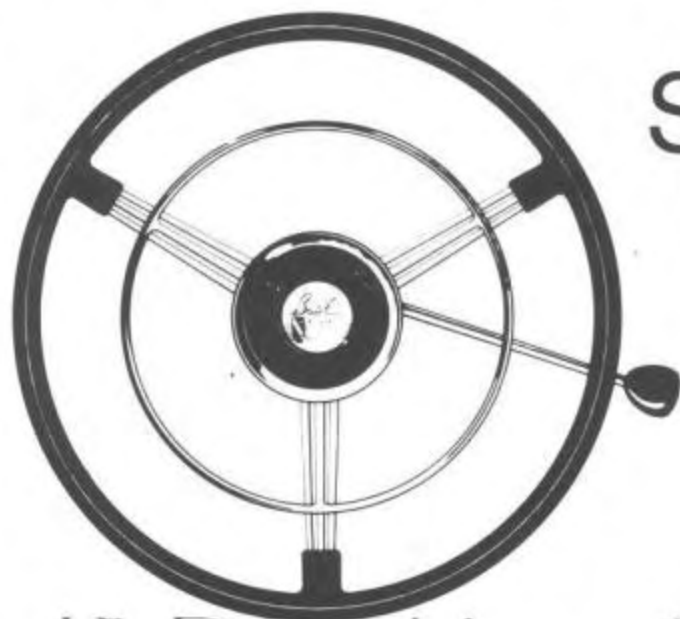
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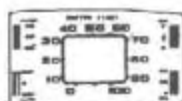
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